



the psalms of Jasmine

Andreas Gripp

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Beliveau Books

STRATFORD

The Psalms of Jasmine

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The Psalms of Jasmine

Acrylic blots the canvas in topaz.
Your artist's brush snapped in two
as a sacrifice without a blemish.

This room once
held a bed, a vanity, and drawers of frayed
clothing. The afghan is the only survivor
in this present studio—a yellow-gold
gone to brown, unravelled at the edges, unused
since that unwanted visitation. Twenty
years past and the scent like a pond gone bog.
A penitent's reminder that the fault
was allegedly yours with no
priestly absolution proffered
even on Sundays.

Dimittetur illi, again and again and again

On the other side of the window,
a stream carries leaves on its back
like a gift for a child—boots
splashing where it curdles.

Jasmine is imagined, your vision
giving her mane a red like the maple
in its autumnal glory.

This house has been yours since
parental passing. Sometimes when you
sleep you hear a scream. You tell
yourself it's Jasmine and that she never
should have opened the bedroom door,
no matter how passive the knock.

A frown is a smile
standing on its head. Your head
a depository for rejected dreams.

Your hands mold the clay
as if it will never see the flame.
The last time you sculpted, you
were naked like that night
many years ago
and both times you forget how
that came to be.

Maybe it's a bird but nothing
specific. Let none of them feel
unwanted, like the way you spread
their seed so there's enough for every
one.

When you favoured the cardinal,
because its appearance was supposedly
your mother, you asked her why she'd
been so silent after the hurt, if
there would come an explanation
amid the snaps of sesame and corn.

Tomorrow, the fallen leaves
will be raked by the gentle man
who lives where the stream begins
to pool.

The girl's prints are chiseled into
the mud. First here, then there,
where they disappear under leafy
loam.

The rain will wash them away
like something to be cleansed
and never spoken of again.

There is a name for beyond the outside
which cannot be pronounced.

Here no boundaries can exist
and reality is a flight of free and
fancy. Today, Jasmine will learn
of touch. Not the one of late in the
night but that of early morning, when
the neighbour's cat rubs against her leg
and the leaf she kept in her coat
from the day before
crunches like a squeezebox
her grandfather played after her
first communion.

It is named after *mother*, who kept
her tongue in a sieve and uttered
nothing.

You write a poem of Jasmine
but it tells of only colour.
But how can this be when
the petals are white
and the green of its stem
is like all the others?
You scribe of tea instead,
with milk, with honey,
as if the sweetness will linger
because of it.

There's a haiku to accompany
your sketch before it's coloured.

The ginger-haired
girl with a welling of both orbs
but not a single drop
trickles forth:

viridescent eyes
returning the solar light
absent of tear-fall

They too can seep as tea
once the brittle cup has cooled.

She told you of islands
in the sky, your muse, the one
that sits unpainted. She gave
you the play to write and your
page stays blank like a desert of
white sand. Why do you think of
sleep at a time like this? Where
are your characters—the parents
dead and the phantom friends
who never were? What is it
that hides the stars when
the clouds are swept away?
What is it that hinders your muse
from appearing when you offer
wishes on the invisible, falling
as from the funereal?

Act Two, Scene Four—

the denial. *Keep quiet, we
don't talk of such things.*

When cirrhosis struck her down,
you emptied every bottle in the
house. She never grieved her
spouse's passing but you've already
added wailing between her lines
unless it's a lament for her only
child.

Jasmine doesn't appear until the
final third but you scribble her in
as your understudy. The sister you
never had or is it daughter? But then
that would require the flesh of man
and you couldn't be further away
if you tried.

Pages are crumpled into balls,
set aflame. You call them stars
and name them—*Antares, Betelgeuse,*
Sirius, Sol. Are there ones who live
around the others and look toward our own?
What do they call it and is there a single
thing you make they'd understand?

Your palms held the sand when you
went to the beach as a girl, each one
a light in the sky when the dark arose
and you hoped that father was too
drunk to call for you.

The next morning, you thought of
what was left behind on the shore:
a castle, peopled with cigarette
butts he'd tossed aside as you built
and you hoped your ass wasn't
showing in the sun.

You never leave the house: groceries
delivered, mail slid into a slot,
the door's mouth. It says little,
just like you. You call to Jasmine
to answer your prayers, saying
Deity is ever-silent and a human
empathizes more than the ethereal
could ever hope to.

Laudate Dominum

Dominum

Dominum

You'll leave it all to *her*,
your sole inheritor—just as your parents
bequeathed it entirely
to you. Giving is the pearl of
great price, tossed before the
swine who cherishes it more
than the wise one who said it
wasn't worthy.

See it, shining in the rain
which has nowhere else to drop
when clouds are exhausted
from sailing over hill after hill
and the people beseeching
earnestly for the ground to stay dry
for just a single day longer,

when not enough is better than
a little too much.

When you were twelve,
the boy in front of you expressed
his love for you in a note.
Though he was beautiful then,
you knew, through the cruelty
that is time, he'd one day
look like *him*, a vision
you could never bear to see.

Blessèd be the blind,
your mantra as it's torn
into pieces too small
to hold a single damnable letter,
cursive or not.

Bungalow. It is where you
reside. Next to you, an empty
lot where a house had been built
but burned to the ground shortly
after. The land was for sale but
no takers. Rumour had it you were
an arsonist at 13.

You adore the summer and the
fireflies of night. What is light
but space surrounded by the caress
of darkness; flame but the intensity
of love so strong that it incinerates?

School was merely a place
to practice mating. With other
girls who knew to reject the
touch of male.

Woman is whom God should
have made first. A more beautiful
name for each animal. Someone
the Lord would not have said *no* to
regarding the leaves and fruit
of trees.

A river curves like a female,
gives birth to what is new.
Tigris and Euphrates—
the cradle of civilization.

You check every map you can
for Eden. As long as Adam breathed,
it could never have been
paradise.

It's between dreams
that you are most alone;
whether it's the name you nearly shriek,
or the two you dread to whisper,
there's peace only in the reveries
of night, where the hurt, you believe,
can never be real.

Able to offer no light
of its own, the moon
is but a mirror for the sun
to admire its own reflection.

She's the only one
you can try to love. *Jasmine*.
You no longer find her
within your abode.

In the hallway are three rooms.
In front of each are doors that lead
to doors. What is *closet* anyway,
but the stashing of a soul
too shy to be seen naked?
What is *three* but *one* multiplied
thrice? *Trinity* but the absence
of loneliness or the deceit
that it can be escaped?

Your sight is almost seared
on the day you stepped out
onto the earth, one giant leap
for spirit kind.

You granted her a colouring
of her crown, red tresses
snaking past her breast,
if she had them.

The Tale of the Garden
is wrong—the Fall occurred
because only *one* was tasted.

The cityscape is
cracked and bleeding.
You hear a jazz trumpet
in the middle of road
rage. Panners ask you for
change. You tell them to fuck
off. After the fact, you give
a dollar to one, whisper *God
Bless.*

A puddle reflects the image
of the sun. When a pedestrian
stomps into it, the light is splintered.
Your first thought is one of hate,
how someone can callously
blot out our star. Within seconds,
a cloud conceals what's above you,
making it human.

Semper hominum.

This bus, the sound between
stops. The pushing in, against.
There's no space to hold you
and Jasmine is jostled about
like a child's toy. You both leave
before your destination—a walk
that's so silent it is noise.

The cemetery is serene
like a proverbial valley with sheep.
Who is worthy to shepherd you,
to gently touch *her* with a staff?

Ravens gather in a conspiracy.
You were taught they were ugly,
their dissonant voices. Jasmine
says they're the most beautiful
of the birds.

Who can tell her she's wrong?
Who can tell her she's wrong?

You've taken her hand by
the tombstone and you both
study the etching that names
names and promises the bliss
of togetherness.

When others pass, they think you
mad to see your outstretched
arm, taking hold of nothing
(supposedly).

Who is it you're speaking to,
who inspires you to paint,
to scribe, to sculpt, to say
you love the world and everything
in it?



The Paean of Mephistopheles

It all began the morning the sun had split the clouds like Moses with a staff. I couldn't see any of it in this cerement of darkness. What we call *blindness* is but the supplement of sound and I heard more than the gift of vision would have brought me. Listen to the crow in its call to mate. You believe the world has more than enough already and I plead they're misunderstood. And who is it that sings a song perfectly? I missed the hymnal's high notes and the refrain was something superfluous.

Play it Sam. Not in acquiescence to Rick, but because *Casablanca* is your favourite movie and the one that speaks of sacrifice. It's a rock-throw from Tangier and I'll let you pick between Ginsberg and Burroughs. Kerouac is out of the question. Look at him, the glorified typist according to Capote. Don't tell me there wasn't a grudge after that. Whatever forgiveness might be, it's not the antonym to hate.

The day you showed me your poem, I asked to read it in braille. You replied my eyesight's not that bad and the cost would be prohibitive. What are glasses anyway, but to attempt to wipe clear the blurring of things that should otherwise remain opaque? If translucence was the universal norm, we'd know the names of objects beyond the catalogue left by Messier. The constellations are entirely subjective. You see a bear, I an elephant. And where is its offspring? How can something at the speed of light look locked in its stance? Or is it we who are frozen?

My optometrist speaks Latin between slides. It's pointless to me although every disease sounds better when she does it. And who is it that can truly see the picture, big? We both fall into the chasm when our hands are seeking to lead.

Our feet have a mind of their own when we endeavour to run. The horizon is something that can never be reached. Tell the flat-earththers they are wrong yet again. I'd love to go through their excuses. Truth answers not to the subjective—if it did we'd all be rich.

The view over Wittenberg is obscured. My wings are ragged and lacking in the beauty of feathers. All who gaze upon me shun and shame and I fly only to flee.

Mythology has its reality revoked by lack of evidence. You'll play the skeptic with everything I question. How can you not care that 20,000 Yemeni children starve in the 2020s? The lion's roar is mute and no one picks up the Charleston. It's only your lips flapping now, cancelling out everything I say and the ones who re-tweeted, anathema.

I never knew how lovely your hair was until you cut it off. I would have slipped the sweeper a twenty but it was trash-binned before I could arrive. Give my regards to the salon. They know not what they do.

Brother Dominic, why are the monks bald who bake your bread? None have felt the touch of women and they hide all day in their hoods. Your tunic was torn in Tunis, you left the faith but pretend to this very hour. While the others took of the Host, you chewed on gum instead. Beware the karma of cavity.

The manifesto you showed me was lacking in quotes. If there's no scripture, how do you say it's from God? Do you also speak from Sinai? Is your backyard hedge aflame? And what do you feed us in lieu of manna? Excuse me while I polish the hooves of my golden calf.

They also churn to cheese, the milk. It's been properly stored and aged. If you serve with Sauvignon, I'll eat like Jean Valjean. He knows what it is to be hunted, the stain of sin upon his breast like Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroine. What is the name of your phantom Javert?

As we forgive those who trespass against us is breaking the 9th commandment. We do nothing of the kind but lie to the Father to His face. Prayer is a fantasy of the mind. There is nothing invisible that can't be revealed. Even space is filled with space. I'll show you the microscopic and we'll settle our bet. Empty is but a human construct. If there was any place in the universe devoid of something, I'd be there. But then the problem would begin anew.

A man imprisoned is the epitome of humility. See him use the lavatory without a concealing door. Hear him as he's raped and then expect some larva-change. The butterfly's envied by moths which never do swallow the light. So far and yet so close.

Your mother was a beauty in the nude. I say this because you left the photo album on the table. Did shyness overcome her when she picked up the pics at the Fotomat?

We are the only animals, clothed. All the others haven't a stitch and we say we are enlightened. Eden's *curse* continues to carry until this very minute. Thank the Lord for his swatting-with-a-sledgehammer moment. Otherwise we'd wince all the time. The flies all dropped like Newtonian apples and their worms all ate the core. The maggots know what they are doing and their inheritance is the Earth.

Time has its torrential downpour when it's a flash at the speed of sound. And then, the excruciating slowness of each individual tick. How quick does the day go by when you're hanging from a cross and vinegar is all you've had to drink? Blood bleeds out in hours and the glass is drained of sand. See Him on the beach as He says where to cast your net. Mercy was never shown to a single fish. When I went pseudo-vegetarian, I continued to consume. It's funny how far that five and seven will take you. Watch five-thousand spit out the bones.

Everything I take in is dead. And not just the animal flesh of my shoes and on my plate when I'm cheating. Watch *The Maltese Falcon* and tell me who's still alive. Play Prince and Jimi and a little Lennon too. Imagine there's a Heaven. That Norma Jean comes back at every itching interval.

Miles birthed the cool and he was kilometers ahead of the crowd. Tell me that the wind refuses to carry each note. If Gabriel can summon Jehovah, why not the trumpets of Greenwich? Or is the hearing only selective?

Did you even listen?

The Word was in the Beginning. But then the fossils deemed it false. Why is Sophocles ignored and Plato's dialogue inerrant? Is it due to tragedy? What would we be if we didn't laugh? I called King Lear comedic in a pretzel-logic way. Three daughters worked out fine for Carol Brady. They never said she'd divorced. A widow was much more acceptable then.

Wasn't it the Age of Aquarius or were the hippies tripped-up hypocrites?

Scales all turned to feathers before the dinosaurs' days had ended. See it for yourself, just above the iridium line. Damn that bloody meteor!

All of us are naked in the shower. I don't mean at once, in the same stall. That would never be conducive for a poem. I simply regressed to the point about the clothing. Do the children who sew for a pittance make it moral? Was the cotton picked to the lash the sign of godly purity?

I plucked the olives from the salad and that made it less than Greek. I kept the feta but talked of German-Jew. It's been an oxymoron since nineteen-thirty-three. Bring me beer from Bavaria and hot latkes from the slum. I'll show you gladly what can and can't go together.

Ohm, says the Sensei from beneath the baobab.

I write with wine not with coffee. One awakes, the other awakens. The difference lies in their ingredients. Or were you reading only the French?

Condiments do not freshen nor do they offer praise. And if left with bread alone, they're a bite that's left untouched. Study what's in the garbage the next time you doubt my words. The meat is much too precious to *toss* in crinkly green.

Let us give a eulogy for all the crowns of golden wheat. Children die from what is wasted. Just ask the Ethiopians. And they never stashed the Ark. Not Noah's ship but that covenant of Moses. There. See how he made it back as if we'd gone full-circle?

I despise whoever reads. Not just anything but this. Who are you to sit upon your throne of lily white and grant it pardon of all its faults? It is rubbish; it's refuse. Refuse its publication or else you'll share in all its blame.

Job's only job was to not complain. He couldn't even do *that* right when the boils found their mark. And his daughters are back from the dead? Even Lazarus is skeptical of such a miracle. Since he died a second time.

That's worse than all the rest of us who pass away but once.

The black cat is the luckiest feline alive. Observe her, under the ladder beside broken glass. Double the points if it's a mirror. Subtract not for vanity.

It's all a superstition Richard Dawkins poked in jest. But note the narrowing of his eyes. He was deadpan in delivery and a Jesus-Mohammad tag team would fail to take him down. Gautama would never fight and Mahavira's averse to shooin' flies. Father Abraham will save the day if he slits the throat of his son.

Stop. It was never carried that far. Think of those religions if it had.

What is *ugly*, anyway? Is it the absence of beauty or too much of it at once?

In the fire he's disfigured. But then the ash that's left at the end is the loveliest thing you've ever seen. If my poem succumbs to sense, will you admit the world's without?

I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

You screamed but out in space.

The universe, they say, is almost 13.8 billion years old. That's just *this* one. If Big Bangs are followed by crunches, how many times have we played out this scenario? What good is coming back as a toad? To prove the amphibians experience it best? There is air in both the water and the sky. At least for them. We've lived but half a life.

Somewhere, over Australian dunes, a didgeridoo announces the prayers. Or dinner. What is one without the other? Isn't that what saying grace is all about?

To survive embeds our DNA. If selected naturally, my genetics carry on. But I am childless, and the family dies with *me*. Tell my mother and my father that the disappointment was unintended. Heed the fiddler's rooftop serenade. Watch his dance when the sun sinks like an anchor of a ship at port. Count the sailors too drunk to step without a stumble. Gaze upon the smoke of cigarettes as if incense to an unpleasable deity.

This poem is riddled with cliché. And how can it not, when what's said is said/not said. If I spoke it first, would it still be in a pile of slush? Drop me back a millennia past and watch my name rise up in fame. But this is my worn and tired card and I lay it on the table. A joker is of little use without its queens and aces.

When I was a child, I thought as a bird. Oh but to live in the trees!
When aloft are midnight stars and you could almost selfishly grab them. But then who could offer wishes?

Mine was for you to come back to me. And your gravestone erased of a name.

When the sun swells and swallows, will what we did on the earth be even a miniscule matter? The rockets of Elon Musk are the singular hope we hold. Let that be your final thought before you succumb to slumber.

The sheep you count are radioactive. Our spectres are known by their scars.

In the End there was silence, and the silence was with God and it *was* God. All things were laid to waste by it.

When a thrush loses its mate, it ignores the seed on the ground. You should have spread it elsewhere, in the cracked and fissured spaces of the asphalt. When rolled over by the tires, they are fruitful. They multiply. They'll never question *why*.

I am the end of folklore. What is a fable anyway, when there are no sons and daughters to share them with? Will their lights allow us to witness what's been here all this time? Will we discern between *I must know* and *I believe*?

Tomorrow is a river that courses in the opposite direction that's expected of it. We bathed in it yesterday. This is good beyond all measure. There is nothing more to teach us.



The Belated Hallelujah

To praise is to revel, to reveal.

The nakedness of voice.

The timbre of predilection.

We rise above ourselves in adoration
of the invisible, for the visible leaves us
forever disappointed

wanting more
of less when less is more.

Hosannas rise from the Dead.
See how much they give
when they can no longer breathe.

Tell me once again that Space
is a god when it has no air in which
to speak it.

We are not children of the First
Big Bang but the Seventh. All is complete,
all is holy. You say that Twelve
is the godliest of numbers,
allowing one for betrayal.

If that is so,
show Judas your mercy,

that he may have been loved
more than the others,

that his silver bought the needy
bread and soap

and fine linen
for the Day that they too
will rise with the resounding of the
Trumpet,

the squall of Tenor Sax.

Look upon all the multitudes—
your Jasmine, your Judas,
Mephistopheles safely tucked
in the bosom of the Lord.

When the calves suckle
as babes, there is none to see
them as meat,

none to deny them their innocence.

Black is the sum of all colour—
White, its absence .

This is what I learned in Art School
(the galaxies and all their backdrop);

that scribbles and stick people
inherit the Earth, their meekness,
humility.

That my pencil bends them as if
by nature, their simple
genuflection.

Glory Be to the rocks, the fossils,
the Light that reached us in its
interval of six. Its falling one short
of perfection.

Its becoming as damned and human
as the rest of us.



Andreas Gripp lives in Stratford, Ontario, with their wife and two cats. They're currently the editor of *Beliveau Review*.



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